MARIONETTES FOR BLIND CHILDREN
Elizabeth Haines

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Marionettes for Blind Children

By ELIZABETH HAINES

AS THE HOLIDAY season approaches there is one engagement to which we look forward with particular pleasure, and that is our show at the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, or as it is more usually known, the Overbrook School for the Blind, Philadelphia.

It all started several years ago when we became interested in the work of the school through a friend and felt we wanted to do something for the children there. At that time we were giving public performances of our marionettes in our studio in Philadelphia, so we decided to invite a group of children from the Overbrook School in for a special show, reserving the studio just for them. As transportation was a problem there were never more than fifteen or twenty in the first groups, and the children were chiefly from the kindergarten, first and second grades. We invited these young children for two reasons—partly because we had specialized in a group of shows created especially for young children from three to eight years and which had been very well received, and partly because the older children at the school had concerts, lectures and plays they could enjoy, but there seemed to be nothing very exciting for the little ones.

That First Performance!

The day of the show arrived. Everything was ready. The whole idea was an experiment for us, and we learned afterwards that the teachers from the school shared our hope that the children would enjoy the show, and our fears that it might be a failure. But we were all willing to try! I think we'll never forget that first performance!

We had selected for our program part of the circus (such acts as the children could "hear" as well as "see") and a play, "The Gingerbread Boy." Two o'clock came, and with it the children. They filed in quietly and settled themselves. The house lights went out, and the footlights came on. Overture! Curtain! And Toto, the marionette clown, was putting his dog, Tony, through all sorts of ridiculous tricks. At first everything was quiet, but as the strangeness wore off and the children began to understand what was happening, their excitement grew and grew, until by the end of the show they were laughing and applauding just as though they had really "seen" it. They loved it: We had made them happy, and when we realized it we were both very near tears. I'll never forget how they crowded around and as with one voice cried, "Oh thank you—thank you."

The Play Must Go On

Their pleasure was so evident that we then and there decided our special shows for them would be continued. Throughout that season we had them in for several other performances at which they saw "The Three Little Pigs," "Peter Rabbit," "The Gingham Dog and the Calico Cat," and again "The Gingerbread Boy" for another group. After the first few performances we learned that attendance at the shows was partly determined on a "reward" basis — improvement in lessons or behavior.

Later we moved to the country and discontinued entirely all studio performances. But we felt that our shows for the blind children must go on, so we suggested that since they couldn't come to us, we'd take our show to them. The first year we performed at the school we set up the stage in the kindergarten class rooms, and gave "Hansel and Gretel," with music from the opera. All the children in the kindergarten, as well as those up to and including the fourth grade (and as many more as could crowd in) saw this show. After the performance we permitted some of the children to handle the figures, and it was touching to hear them say, "Look at her apron," or "See Hansel's wooden shoes."

Do blind children really enjoy performances they cannot see? Read this story and learn the answer.

It was at this show, too, that a very amusing thing happened. While we were busy showing the figures to a group of children back stage, an equally interested group was examining the properties on the stage itself, which was still set from the last scene. All went well while they examined the candy cage, the gingerbread house, and the flowers and windows of candy and sugar. But when they came to the magic oven, indignant voices were raised in protest. When we went to see what was wrong, the situation was almost out of hand, for the children in all good faith were saying "Magic door, open. Open magic door," just as they'd heard the witch say, and they were in a perfect fury of indignation because the oven door refused to respond to the magic formula! Peace was restored when we hurriedly explained that the magic door had refused to obey because it was confused by too many commands, but if they would come up quietly, one by one, and give the command, it would open. So for about ten minutes, while they filed past, we pulled the hidden string which opens the magic door, and they firmly believed it was through their power, and their's alone, that this miracle was wrought!

The next year the performance was held in the school's large auditorium, and everyone came from the kindergartners to the advanced students. Our program consisted of three short numbers—"Alice and the Caterpillar," "The Gingham Dog and the Calico Cat," "Madame Cow, Magician" (an educational skit on the health values of milk) and a play—"Little Black Sambo." Of course, with such a large audience, groups backstage after the show were out of the question, but we did go over to the kindergarten class rooms afterward. There the children all sat around on the floor in a circle, while Mr. Haines and I sat on the outer edge. Then, one by one, they took turns asking questions. Here are some of the things they wanted to know:

"How old is Toto?"

"Did the dog and cat really eat each other up?"

"Were they real tigers? They sounded real."

"Where are all the marionettes now?"

"I was frightened about the tigers, but I knew you wouldn't let them bite me."

"What made the bumping noise in the milk show?"

"I like it when the tigers fight."

When we answer their questions—some of them posers for we try to keep the illusion that the marionettes are real, that they're really alive. For instance, when one little boy suggested that perhaps the Gingham Dog and Calico Cat might have run away, we agreed that it was possible, and when he offered to look for them we told him if he saw them anywhere around the school grounds we'd certainly like to know about it, and this he just as solemnly agreed to do.

After the questions were over, and we were saying goodbye—surprise! They presented us with some gifts they'd made—a calendar from the first grade for Mr. Haines, and one from the second grade for me. A few days later we had the biggest surprise of all when we received a note from the school's superintendent saying he was forwarding some letters from the children, some of which would be in Braille. We looked at each other, wondering how we were going to read Braille, but when the letters arrived we found that the teachers had very carefully written under each Braille sign just what it meant; and what we liked especially was that they'd included mistakes, too. These Braille "thank you" letters were written by the younger children; the older children sent us typewritten ones. The thought behind

(Continued on page 566)

Hansel, Gretel and the Witch were given an enthusiastic reception

William H. Burdick, M.D.

IN THE DEATH of Dr. William H. Burdick the United States has lost one of its ablest recreation leaders who combined a deep and fundamental philosophy with unusual capacity as an administrator and a practical man of affairs. He saw clearly far beyond the present and worked for long-time needs but at the same time he did not neglect the things that needed to be done today and tomorrow.

He was possessed of rare courage and was ready to stand up and be counted for his convictions. He stood always for high standards in the recreation movement. He saw clearly that the recreation movement must be a truly national movement.

The positions held by Dr. William H. Burdick give no indication of the extent of his influence or the depth of his power. However, in addition to his work as Director of the Baltimore Playground Athletic League and as State Director of Physical and Health Education of Maryland, he was an active leader in the American Physical Education Association and in the National Education Association and in the Society of State Directors of Physical and Health Education. Dr. Burdick was a natural leader of men, ready to pay the price which leadership involves. His leadership never depended upon the positions which he held. Because of all that he was and because of his special capacities men naturally turned to him for advice and for guidance.

Dr. Burdick had dedicated himself to his profession. He had opportunities to increase his financial income, but questions of money did not particularly interest him. Above all he was concerned to do a good job in his chosen profession. Because of the integrity of his own character, the way in which he had integrated his own life, he gave a greater faith in mankind to all those who worked with him.

From the beginning Dr. Burdick was associated with the staff of the National Recreation School and had a large part in the training of younger workers. His wise counsel helped in the meetings of recreation executives and at the Recreation Congresses.

When a man like Dr. Burdick goes a successor may be chosen, but there is never any thought of filling his position for this of course cannot be done because he had built a very special position for himself. —HOWARD BRAUCHER.

Marionettes for Blind Children

(Continued from page 546)

these expressions of good will and apprciation was so lovely to us, it is easy to understand that we considered those letters our nicest Christmas present. You may be sure they were all answered.

Making Necessary Adaptations

And now to the technical side of the question. "How can blind children possibly enjoy a marionette show?" you ask. And the reply is, "you enjoy a drama on the radio, don't you?"

Of course, in presenting these shows, we do use a different technique than usual. First and most important, we select plays with action, whose dialogue carries the plot. Short skits, such as some of our specialty numbers and acts from the circus, which depend on sight alone, are never presented.

Second, we take the silencer off the stage floor so the children can hear the figures moving about. This helps them locate the characters on the stage.

Third, we have our clown, Toto, who acts as master of ceremonies, tell them about the play. He gives a brief description of the setting, and also the costumes. This is done in a very gay, "high" fashion, just as though we always did it at every show. Throughout the entire presentation we want the children to feel that they are experiencing something other children do, and that there is nothing done in the performance which is at all different from shows given for people with normal vision.

Fourth, the children that have partial vision and light perception are seated as close to the stage as possible. The teachers tell us that many times, after the show, those who have sat in front tell the totally blind children any fine point they think they might have missed.

After Toto's introduction, he bids them goodbye, the overture plays, and then the fun begins.

In manipulating the figures and delivering the lines we make the voice an integral part of the action, so by following its sound the children can get a good idea of the physical action of the figures. Usually about a week before we are to be at the school, the teachers familiarize the children with the story on our program, if they don't already know it. This helps to freshen their memory and enables them to have the plot more clearly in mind.

Last year we were a little worried when we

musical instrument so an organ was brought for the two evenings of my visit. We talked of what life together in small places should mean to one and so to all; we sang old folk songs, and we played singing games and group games as best we could between the immovable seats. There were a number of Europeans in the settlement consquently, the Secretary of the School Board came to sit behind the stove the first evening, his face stern and forbidding. The name "Community" suggested the dread word "Communism" and he intended to discover whether or not I had such leanings! I received, later, the offer of his wholehearted support in whatever I might undertake.

Before I left a nominating committee was named to take the initial step in developing a Literary Society. I went back to that community two months later and discovered that the society was in existence and was meeting every two weeks instead of once a month because of the great enthusiasm of the members — and they numbered sixty. A second-hand piano had been bought for the use of school and club and that very evening a program was given of music, recitations and a one-act play. Since then, through the kindly interest of a Woman's Club, fifty books have been given to start a community library. Who shall say that there was not fertility in that little valley which few people know exists?

A Wading Pool for Boston

(Continued from page 540)

two months the pool has frequently accommodated as many as 200 children averaging about eight years in age.

First of its kind in Boston, the project originated under the direction of Major Roswell G. Hall, Superintendent of Public Buildings, whose engineers prepared the plans and supervised the construction in consultation with Willard D. Woodbury, Technical Adviser to the Department. Major Hall, Boston ERA Administrator at the time the project was carried out, is particularly enthusiastic about the advantages children derive from this form of recreation.

The total cost to the city of Boston was only $3,500, the federal government providing the labor; the estimated cost of replacement without federal aid is $22,500. Utilization of janitorial forces in the adjacent municipal building and the provision of simple but sturdy equipment should result in almost negligible operation and maintenance costs.

Magazines and Pamphlets

Recently Received Containing Articles of Interest to the Recreation Worker

MAGAZINES

The Research Quarterly of the American Physical Education Association, December 1935
- A Guide to the Literature of Physical Education, Including Certain Aspects of Health Education and Recreation, by Alice Allene Sefton
- A Bibliography of Skiing in the English Language, by Arthur E. Larkin
- Bibliography for 1934, by G. B. Affleck

The Survey Midmonthly, December 1935
- Project 1—E4—15, Los Angeles, by Katherine Glover

The National Parent-Teacher Magazine, January 1936
- Youth and the Modern World, An Editorial by Aubrey Williams
- Home Play and Recreation, by Lewis R. Barrett

Hygeia, January 1936
- Toys and Games That Teach and Train, by Billie Teel Mettel

The Journal of the National Education Association, December 1935
- Education for Leisure, by Otto T. Mallery

The Record (The Girls' Friendly Society) January 1936
- Mexican Games

Parents' Magazine, January 1936
- Family Fun, by Elizabeth King
- Family Movie Guide

The Journal of the National Education Association, January 1936
- Today's Youth Problems

Progressive Education, December 1935
- Youth and the Government, by Aubrey Williams
- Youth Speaks for Itself, by William W. Hinckley

PAMPHLETS

Report of the Chief of the Forest Service, 1935
- U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. Price $.05

A Statement to the Citizens of Millburn Township, N. J.
- A Report for 1935

First Annual Report — Chicago Recreation Commission, 1935

Planning Your Community—A Manual of First Steps
- Mayor's Committee on City Planning of the City of New York

Municipal Finance Legislation 1935, by Irving Tenner
- Municipal Finance Officers' Association, Chicago. Price $.60

Annual Report of the Milwaukee Municipal Athletic Association, 1935

Snow Sports and Activities
- Bulletin No. 21 — Western Massachusetts Winter Sports Council

ealized that as our "Little Black Sambo" pup-ets have black velvet "skins" they wouldn't make ny noise in walking, so we had Toto explain that This is 'way over in India, in the jungle, where verybody walks around in their bare feet, so they on't make any noise," and this explanation seem-d very satisfactory!

Apart from the pleasure the children derive rom the shows, there is a very practical angle hich surprised us when we learned of it. Miss Margaret Phillips, head of the elementary depart-nent at the school, can tell you about it much bet-er than I. She says, "In our school dramatiza-ion is an important part of the work in the pri-nary grades. After the children heard the show, nterest in dramatizing increased tremendously. Class room work became noticeably better and I m certain it was due to the marionettes. Chil-ren are, of course, clever imitators, and having aught the feeling Mr. and Mrs. Haines put into heir plays, they tried to imitate it."

Miss Phillips also told us that this interest roved to be in no way transitory. Throughout he year the work was consistently better. One of he other teachers told us it was as though a sense f dramatic values had suddenly been made clear o the children, and that often, after our shows, hey would act out parts of the program they specially liked.

The children are so responsive and enthusiastic hat we consider them one of our best audiences. They are so appreciative and inspiring that mari-nette groups, amateur or professional, in other ities, will find their efforts well repaid should hey care to give performances for similar chools.

Re reation at the Elmira Reformatory

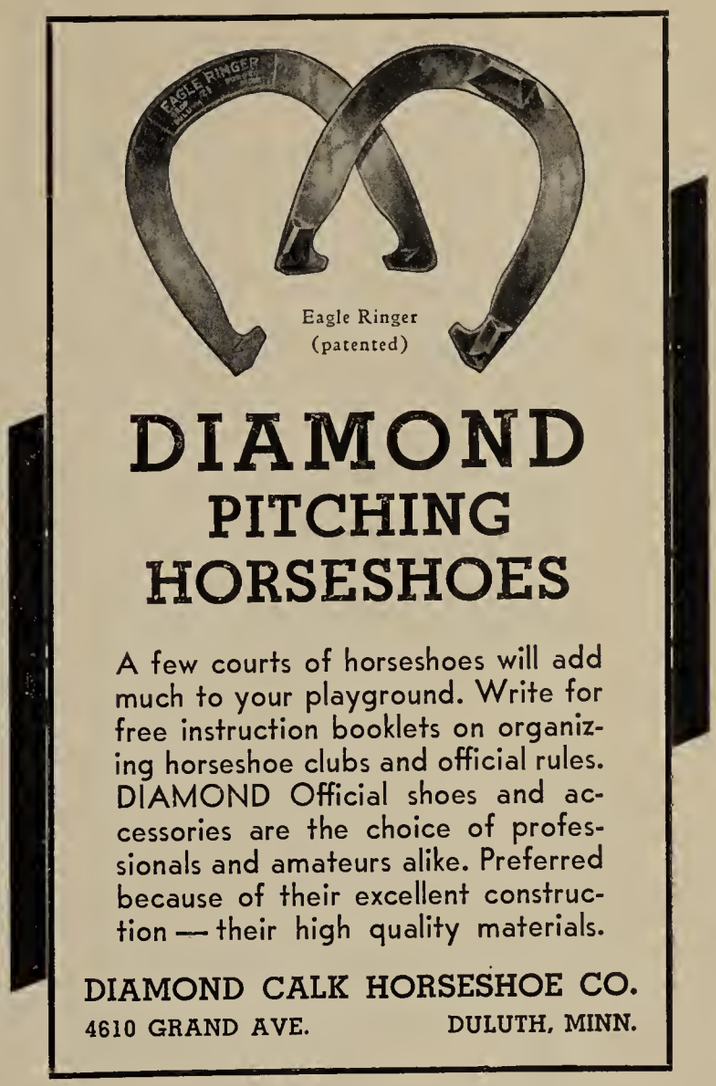
(Continued from page 549)

Recreation has greatly improved the morale of the ntire inmate body, has reduced disciplinary prob-ems, developed a more responsive and coopera-ive relationship with the officials and personnel nd created an environment in conjunction with he academic, vocational, and religious projects hich is more conducive to final rehabilitation.

Cubbing for the Younger Boy

(Continued from page 551)

ood group who is willing to give up his golf on Saturday afternoons, to take a Den on a small, ut exciting hike, culminating in nutting or swim-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ming, or to help in rope spinning, bird study, or in wielding a hammer and saw in backyard carpentry or shack building.

It is all kept as simple, as recreational, as wholesome as possible. At all times the Cub Program is under the auspices of the local Scout Council of a given community. In many places, owing to the growing demand on the part of parents, Den Mothers' Training Courses are being conducted which give helpful guidance not only in the practical aspects of Cubbing but also in its psychological values. The Den Mother is vital to the success of Cubbing. Without her Cubbing would be a very different and perhaps less happy thing. The Scout craves a man's world increasingly. The Cub age boy is still close enough to his mother to delight in her comradeship, and he does not object to her wise, friendly indirect direction of his activities.

For the Cub it is all simply heaps of fun, the best game he has ever played. But behind the fun is a real growing process, the planting of the seeds of a real ideal, an incentive even at nine or ten years old to do one's best, to be a socially minded and handed individual.

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At the Garfield Park Recreation Cent

(Continued from page 552)

(6) Parade of decorated sleds by boys and g under twelve years of age
(7) Programs by various schools and groups trophy
(8) Mass drill and parade of lanterns
(9) Demonstration of hockey given by l fessionals
(10) Figure skating (men and women)
(11) Couple skating race—220 yard dash
(12) Dog sled race (boys and girls under tw years of age)
(13) Costume parade
(14) Cheer leaders' contest—high schools
(15) Tug-of-war with six men teams
(16) Parade of floats on skis
(17) Ice carnival queen and her maids (will chosen)
(18) Parade of schools and groups in costu for trophy

Make Your Recreation Creative

(Continued from page 554)

space for ping pong, reading material, loung around the radio, and other club room pleasur

The leadership in this recreational progran largely gotten from the group itself, the meml checking their abilities on joining, and then tak their turns at leading games or serving on the freshments committee. This training in leader is no negligible matter, but one of the real be fits to be obtained from such recreation. The p gram becomes self-regenerative, and functi with something like perpetual motion.

This social program, born and housed i church, illustrates what can be done in spite institutional limitations. The Student Club act ties are featured in the college paper, its functi are subjects for conversation over college boa ing tables, and it has often been spoken of as " most useful organization on the campus."

Applying the Creative Criterion to Dancin

A final word about what part dancing sho play in such a social program. Here is where creative criterion again comes into its own—m dancing creative, we say, and you not only f yourself with a fine form of wholesome rec tion, but you do an inestimable service to whole social program in the community.

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